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Jackson confirmed as first Black female high court justice

President Joe Biden holds hands with Supreme Court nominee Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson as they watch the Senate vote on her confirmation from the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington, Thursday, April 7, 2022.



Associated Press
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Jackson confirmed as first Black female high court justice

From Front

By **MARY CLARE JALONICK**
and **MARK SHERMAN**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate confirmed Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court on Thursday, shattering a historic barrier by securing her place as the first Black female justice and giving President Joe Biden a bipartisan endorsement for his promised effort to diversify the high court. Cheers rang out in the Senate chamber as Jackson, a 51 year-old appeals court judge with nine years experience on the federal bench, was confirmed 53-47, mostly along party lines but with three Republican votes. Presiding over the vote was Vice President Kamala Harris, also the first Black woman to reach her high office.

Biden tweeted afterward that “we’ve taken another step toward making our highest court reflect the diversity of America.” Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer exulted that it was “a wonderful day, a joyous day, an inspiring day — for the Senate, for the Supreme Court and for the United States of America.” Harris said as she left the Capitol that she was “overjoyed, deeply moved.”

Jackson will take her seat when Justice Stephen Breyer retires this summer, solidifying the liberal wing of the 6-3 conservative-dominated court. She joined Biden at the White House to watch the vote, embracing as it came in. The two were expected to speak, along with Harris, at the White House Friday.

During four days of Senate hearings last month, Jackson spoke of her parents’ struggles through racial segregation and said her “path was clearer” than theirs as a Black American after the enactment of civil rights laws. She attended Harvard University, served as a public defender, worked at a private law firm and was appointed as a member of the U.S. Sentencing Commission. She told senators she would



Supreme Court nominee Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson is sworn in for her confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee March 21, 2022, on Capitol Hill in Washington.

Associated Press

apply the law “without fear or favor,” and pushed back on Republican attempts to portray her as too lenient on criminals she had sentenced.

Jackson will be just the third Black justice, after Thurgood Marshall and Clarence Thomas, and the sixth woman. She will join three other women, Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Amy Coney Barrett — meaning that four of the nine justices will be women for the first time in history.

Her eventual elevation to the court will be a respite for Democrats who fought three bruising battles over former President Donald Trump’s nominees and watched Republicans cement a conservative majority in the final days of Trump’s term with Barrett’s confirmation. While Jackson won’t change the balance, she will secure a legacy on the court for Biden and fulfill his 2020 campaign pledge to nominate the first Black female justice. “This is a tremendously historic day in the White House and in the country,” said White House press secretary Jen Psaki after the vote. “And this is a fulfillment of a promise the president made to the country.” The atmosphere was joyful, though the Senate was divided, as Thursday’s votes were cast. Senators of both par-

ties sat at their desks and stood to vote, a tradition reserved for the most important matters. The upper galleries were almost full for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic two years ago, and about a dozen House members, part of the the Congressional Black caucus, stood at the back of the chamber. Harris called out the tally, pausing with emotion, and Democrats erupted in loud applause and cheers, Schumer pumping his fists. A handful of Republicans stayed and clapped, but most by then had left. Despite Republican criticism of her record, Jackson eventually won three GOP votes. The final tally was far from the overwhelming bipartisan confirmations for Breyer and other justices in decades past, but it was still a significant accomplishment for Biden in the 50-50 split Senate after GOP senators aggressively worked to paint Jackson as too liberal and soft on crime.

Statements from Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Mitt Romney of Utah all said the same thing — they might not always agree with Jackson, but they found her to be enormously well qualified for the job. Collins and Murkowski both decried increasingly

partisan confirmation fights, which only worsened during the battles over Trump’s three picks. Collins said the process was “broken” and Murkowski called it “corrosive” and “more detached from reality by the year.”

Biden, a veteran of a more bipartisan Senate, said from the day of Breyer’s retirement announcement in January that he wanted support from both parties for his history-making nominee, and he invited Republicans to the White House as he made his decision. It was an attempted reset from Trump’s presidency, when Democrats vociferously opposed the three nominees, and from the end of President Barack Obama’s, when Republicans blocked nominee Merrick Garland from getting a vote.

Once sworn in, Jackson will be the second youngest member of the court after Barrett, 50. She will join a court on which no one is yet 75, the first time that has happened in nearly 30 years.

Jackson’s first term will be marked by cases involving race, both in college admissions and voting rights. She has pledged to sit out the court’s consideration of Harvard’s admissions program since she is a member of its board of overseers. But the court could split off a second case involving a

challenge to the University of North Carolina’s admissions process, which might allow her to weigh in on the issue.

Judith Browne Dianis, executive director the Advancement Project, a civil rights organization, said Jackson will make the court more reflective of communities that are most impacted by the judiciary.

“The highest court in the land now will have a first-hand perspective of how the law impacts communities of color — via voting rights, police misconduct, abortion access, housing discrimination or the criminal legal system, among other issues,” she said. “This will ultimately benefit all Americans.”

Jackson could wait as long as three months to be sworn in, as the court’s session generally ends in late June or early July. She remains a judge on the federal appeals court in Washington, but she stepped away from cases there when she was nominated in February.

Republicans spent the confirmation hearings strongly questioning her sentencing record, including the sentences she handed down in child pornography cases, which they argued were too light. Jackson declared that “nothing could be further from the truth” and explained her reasoning in detail. Democrats said she was in line with other judges in her decisions.

The GOP questioning in the Judiciary Committee showed the views of many Republicans, though, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who said in a floor speech Wednesday that Jackson “never got tough once in this area.”

Democrats criticized the Republicans’ questioning. “You could try and create a straw man here, but it does not hold,” said New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker at the committee’s vote earlier this week. The panel deadlocked on the nomination 11-11, but the Senate voted to discharge it from committee and moved ahead with her confirmation. □

U.S. Navy intends to decommission some of its newest warships

By **DAVID SHARP**

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) —

The Navy that once wanted smaller, speedy warships to chase down pirates has made a speedy pivot to Russia and China — and many of those recently built ships could be retired.

The U.S. Navy wants to decommission nine ships in the Freedom-class of littoral combat ships — warships that cost about \$4.5 billion altogether to build.

The Navy contends in its budget proposal that the move would free up \$50 million per ship annually for other priorities. But it would also reduce the size of the fleet that's already surpassed by China in sheer numbers, something that could cause members of Congress to balk.

Adm. Mike Gilday, chief of naval operations, defended the proposal that emphasizes long-range weapons and modern warships, while shedding other ships ill equipped to face current threats. "We need a ready, capable, lethal force more than we need a bigger force that's less ready, less lethal, and less capable," he said Monday at the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space symposium in Maryland. All told, the Navy wants to scrap 24 ships, including five cruisers



The USS Detroit, a Freedom-class of littoral combat ship, arrives Friday, Oct. 14, 2016, in Detroit.

Associated Press

and a pair of Los Angeles-class submarines, as part of its cost-cutting needed to maintain the existing fleet and build modern warships. Those cuts surpass the proposed nine ships to be built. Most of them are older vessels. However, the littoral combat ships that are targeted are young. The oldest of them is 10 years old. The Navy envisioned fast, highly maneuverable warships capable of operating in near-shore, littoral waters when it announced the program a few months after Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The ships topped

50 mph (80 kph) — fast enough to chase down pirates — and utilized steerable waterjets instead of conventional propellers. The ships were supposed to be made versatile through plug-and-play mission modules for surface combat, mine-sweeping operations or anti-submarine warfare. But those mission modules were beset by problems, and the anti-submarine capability was canceled in the new budget. And what about that speed? The fastest ship can't outrun missiles, and firing up those marine tur-

bines for an extra burst of speed turned the ships into gas guzzlers, analysts said. Early versions also were criticized as too lightly armed and armored to survive combat. The speedy Freedom-class ships proposed for decommissioning feature a traditional steel hull. That entire class of ships suffers from a propulsion defect that will be costly repair. The Navy proposes keeping a second variant, the aluminum Independence class.

U.S. Senate Armed Services Chair Jim Inhofe said the program was plagued by

troubles from the start, and that "moving forward the Navy must avoid similar acquisition disasters."

U.S. Rep. Elaine Luria, D-Virginia, was more blunt, tweeting that it "sucks" to be decommissioning so many ships, especially newer ones. "The Navy owes a public apology to American taxpayers for wasting tens of billions of dollars on ships they now say serve no purpose," she said.

Some detractors proclaimed littoral combat ships to be the Navy's "Little Crappy Ship," but that's not fair, said defense analyst Loren Thompson.

"It's not a little crappy ship. It does what it was supposed to do. What it was supposed to do isn't enough for the kind of threats that we face today," said Thompson, from the Lexington Institute.

In the Navy's defense, threats shifted swiftly from the Cold War to the war on terror to the current Great Power Competition in which Russia and China are asserting themselves, he said.

In the end, the Navy may be content with smaller numbers of Freedom-class ships for maritime security and small surface combatant operations, said Bryan Clark, defense analyst at the Hudson Institute. □

Judge tosses Girl Scouts' recruitment suit vs. Boy Scouts

By **LARRY NEUMEISTER**

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A federal judge on Thursday rejected Girl Scouts' claims that the Boy Scouts created marketplace confusion and damaged their recruitment efforts by using words like "scouts" and "scouting" in recruitment drives.

Manhattan Judge Alvin K. Hellerstein ruled that the Boy Scouts of America can describe their activities as "scouting" without referring to gender and that the matter does not need to be put to a jury.

Hellerstein said his written decision caps a "serious,

contentious and expensive" litigation and necessitates dismissal of the lawsuit brought by the Girl Scouts of the United States of America.

The lawsuit was filed in late 2018, a year after the Boy Scouts announced that boy scouting and cub scouting would be open to girls, leading the organizations to compete for members after social trends and a rise in sports league participation drove down membership for decades. The pattern worsened when the pandemic hit.

"The Boy Scouts adopted the Scout Terms to describe

accurately the co-ed nature of programming, not to confuse or exploit Girl Scouts' reputation," Hellerstein wrote. "Such branding is consistent with the scout-formative branding Boy Scouts has used for a century, including in its co-ed programs that have existed since the 1970s."

The term "scout" is descriptive of both the Boy Scouts' and Girl Scouts' programming, the judge wrote. "The Boy Scouts' decision to become co-ed, even if it affects Girl Scouts' operations, does not demonstrate bad faith," the judge added. Hellerstein's deci-



Boy Scouts of America uniforms are displayed in the retail store at the headquarters for the French Creek Council of the Boy Scouts of America in Summit Township, Pa., Feb. 18, 2020.

Associated Press

sion comes while the Boy Scouts are in bankruptcy proceedings in Delaware that began in February 2020. The Irving, Texas-based organization sought bankruptcy protection after it was named in hun-

dreds of lawsuits brought by individuals claiming they were molested by scout leaders as minors.

Messages seeking comment left with lawyers in the case were not immediately returned. □

House panel: Justice Dept. 'obstructing' Trump records probe

By **FARNOUSH AMIRI** and **MICHAEL BALSAMO**

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A congressional oversight committee on Thursday said the Justice Department is "obstructing" its investigation into former President Donald Trump's handling of White House records by preventing the release of information from the National Archives.

The House Committee on Oversight and Reform sent a letter to Attorney General Merrick Garland accusing the Justice Department of impeding the panel's expanded investigation into the 15 boxes of White House records that Trump took to his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida after leaving office last year. The Archives in February revealed it had found classified material in the boxes and referred the matter to the Justice Department.

The letter from Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y., the chairwoman of the Oversight Committee, outlines communications between the committee and the National Archives that took place between February to late March.

In those letters, Maloney made a series of requests for information she said the committee needs to determine if Trump violated federal records laws over his handling of sensitive and



Former President Donald Trump smiles as he pauses while speaking to supporters at a Turning Point Action gathering in Phoenix, July 24, 2021.

Associated Press

even classified information. In response, the general counsel for the archivist wrote on March 28 that "based on our consultation with the Department of Justice, we are unable to provide any comment."

"By blocking NARA from producing the documents requested by the Committee, the Department is obstructing the Committee's investigation," Maloney wrote in the letter released Thursday.

Maloney added that while the committee is not looking to interfere with the department's ongoing inves-

tigation, lawmakers have not received any explanation as to why the department is preventing the archivist from providing information about the contents of the boxes.

The House's oversight panel has repeatedly cited its authority to investigate matters involving the Presidential Records Act, which was enacted in 1978 after former President Richard Nixon wanted to destroy documents related to the Watergate scandal.

Maloney had warned in December 2020 that she had "grave concerns" that

the Trump administration was not complying with the federal records act, even writing in a letter to the archivist citing those concerns that the departing administration "may not be adequately preserving records and may be disposing of them."

While federal law bars the removal of classified documents to unauthorized locations, it is possible that in this case, Trump could try to argue that, as president, he was the ultimate declassification authority.

The former president has denied reports of tensions

with the National Archives and his lawyers have said that "they are continuing to search for additional presidential records that belong to the National Archives."

The attorney general has acknowledged that the department received the referral from the Archives, but it is longstanding Justice Department policy not to comment on investigations. Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill may face a long wait for answers to their questions about specific investigations.

Generally, under Justice Department guidelines, details of investigations are supposed to remain out of the public view until charges are filed or warrants are filed. And, if grand juries are convened, the Justice Department is precluded under federal law from discussing specifics of a grand jury investigation before an indictment is handed down.

Garland has also made clear to prosecutors that the Justice Department won't be influenced by outside political pressure.

The Oversight Committee asked Garland to respond by next week with either a green light for the National Archives to cooperate with their request or provide an explanation as to why the department is imposing such limitations. □



Wreckage and debris from a capsized boat washes ashore at Cabrillo National Monument near where a boat capsized just off the coast on Sunday, May 2, 2021, in San Diego.

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The captain of an overloaded smuggling boat that crashed into rocks and

broke up off the San Diego coast last year, killing three immigrants, pleaded guilty Wednesday to federal

Captain pleads guilty in San Diego smuggling boat deaths

charges. Antonio Hurtado, 40, of San Diego entered pleas to felony counts of attempted human smuggling resulting in death and attempted human smuggling for financial gain. He could face up to life in prison when he is sentenced in July. Prosecutors say Hurtado, a United States citizen, was carrying 32 immigrants from Mexico into the United States last May. The boat was traveling in the dark, in rainy weather with large ocean swells. In a plea agreement, Hurtado said that he used drugs

during the journey and at one point lost consciousness and the vessel drove in circles for more than an hour until the other people on board were able to wake him, according to a statement from the U.S. attorney's office. At around 6 a.m. on May 2, the boat's engine died and Hurtado couldn't restart it. The 40-foot (12-meter) trawler-style boat drifted and was about 50 feet (15 meters) from shore when it ran aground and broke apart in the pounding surf off Cabrillo National Monument. Hurta-

do jumped out and swam to shore, while the other passengers were flung into the water when the boat was smashed, prosecutors said. People in the area, including a Navy rescue swimmer and National Park Service employees, tried to rescue them. However, Maria Eugenia Chavez Segovia, 41, Maricela Hernandez Sanchez, 35, and Victor Perez Degollado, 29, drowned after suffering blunt-force injuries to their heads, according the San Diego County medical examiner's office. □

U.N. assembly suspends Russia from top human rights body

By EDITH M. LEDERER and
JENNIFER PELTZ

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) —

The U.N. General Assembly voted Thursday to suspend Russia from the world organization's leading human rights body over allegations of horrific rights violations by Russian soldiers in Ukraine, which the United States and Ukraine have called tantamount to war crimes.

The vote was 93-24 with 58 abstentions, significantly lower than the vote on two resolutions the assembly adopted last month demanding an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine, withdrawal of all Russian troops and protection for civilians. Both of those resolutions were approved by at least 140 nations. U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield launched the campaign to suspend Russia from its seat on the 47-member Human Rights Council in the wake of videos and photos of streets in the town of Bucha strewn with corpses of what appeared to be civilians after Russian soldiers retreated. The deaths have sparked global revulsion and calls for tougher sanctions on Russia, which has vehemently denied its troops were responsible. Russia is the second country to have its membership rights stripped at the rights council which was estab-



A completed resolution vote tally to affirm the suspension of the Russian Federation from the United Nations Human Rights Council is displayed during a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, Thursday, April 7, 2022, at United Nations headquarters.

lished in 2006. In 2011, Libya was suspended by the assembly when upheaval in the North African country brought down longtime leader Moammar Gadhafi. While almost half the U.N.'s 193 member nations supported the resolution, more than half either voted against it, abstained or didn't vote.

Explaining their decision not to support the resolution, some countries called it premature, noting that there are ongoing investigations into whether war crimes have occurred, or said it would undermine

the credibility of the Human Rights Council and the United Nations. Others said the resolution reflected American and European geopolitical agendas and what opponents called Western hypocrisy and selective outrage about human rights. Before the vote, Ukraine's U.N. Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya urged assembly members to keep the Human Rights Council from "sinking" and suspend Russia, saying it has committed "horrific human rights violations and abuses that would be equated to war crimes and crimes

against humanity."

"Russia's actions are beyond the pale," he said. "Russia is not only committing human rights violations, it is shaking the underpinnings of international peace and security." Russia's deputy ambassador Gennady Kuzmin urged members to vote "no."

"What we're seeing today is an attempt by the United States to maintain its dominant position and total control," he said. "We reject the untruthful allegations against us, based on staged events and widely circulated fakes."

Associated Press

In an appeal to some member states before the vote, Russia said the attempt to expel it from the Human Rights Council is political and being supported by countries that want to preserve their dominant position and control over the world. Those nations want to continue "the politics of neo-colonialism of human rights" in international relations, Russia said in the document obtained by The Associated Press, insisting that its priority is to promote and defend human rights, including multilaterally in the Human Rights Council.

While the Human Rights Council is based in Geneva, its members are elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms. Russia's term ends in December 2023. The March 2006 resolution that established the council says the assembly may suspend membership rights of a country "that commits gross and systematic violations of human rights."

The brief resolution that was approved expresses "grave concern at the ongoing human rights and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, particularly at the reports of violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law by the Russian Federation, including gross and systematic violations and abuses of human rights." □

Nations to release millions of barrels of oil amid war

PARIS (AP) — The International Energy Agency said Thursday that its member countries are releasing 60 million barrels of oil from their emergency reserves on top of previous U.S. pledges to take aim at energy prices that have soared since Russia invaded Ukraine.

The Paris-based organization says the new commitments made by its 31 member nations, which include the United States and much of Europe, amount to a total of 120 million barrels over six months, the largest

release in the group's history.

Half of that will come from the U.S. as part of the larger release from its strategic petroleum reserve that President Joe Biden announced last week.

The IEA agreed last Friday to add to the amount of oil hitting the global market. It comes on top of the 62.7 million barrels that the agency's members said they would release last month to ease shortages. The releases show "the determination of member countries to protect the

global economy from the social and economic impacts of an oil shock following Russia's aggression against Ukraine," IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol said. "Events in Ukraine are becoming more distressing by the day, and action by the IEA at this time is needed to relieve some of the strains in energy markets." Energy markets have been squeezed by surging demand as the global economy rebounded from the COVID-19 pandemic, outpacing supply and driving up prices. □



IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol speaks during the closing media conference at the International Energy Agency (IEA) ministerial meeting in Paris, Thursday, March 24, 2022.

Associated Press

Yemen's president steps aside amid efforts to end war

By **AHMED AL-HAJ** and **SAMY MAGDY**
Associated Press

SANAA, Yemen (AP) — Yemen's exiled president stepped aside and transferred his powers to a presidential council Thursday, as international and regional efforts to end the country's long-running civil war gained momentum with a two-month truce.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, major players in the war, appear to have had a role in President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi's decision, quickly welcoming it with a pledge of \$3 billion in aid. The head of the new council has close ties to Riyadh.

It remains to be seen how the development will impact Yemen's grinding conflict. A Saudi-led coalition of which the UAE is a member has for years been fighting the Iran-backed Houthi rebels to restore Hadi's government to power. So far, U.N. mediation efforts have yielded little fruit, and fighting, airstrikes and missile attacks had been escalating in the war until the cease-fire took effect. Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdul-Salam dismissed any significance of the new council. The rebels have in the past benefited from squabbles among their rivals.



Yemen's President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi walks next of his Tunisian counterpart Beji Caid Essebsi, not in photo, upon his arrival at Tunis-Carthage international airport to attend the Arab Summit, in Tunis, Tunisia, March 30, 2019.

Associated Press

"Our Yemeni people are not concerned with any illegitimate decisions made by illegitimate parties beyond their borders," Abdul-Salam tweeted.

Peter Salisbury, Yemen expert at the International Crisis Group, described the power transfer as the "most consequential shift in the inner workings of the anti-Houthi bloc since war began."

Hadi, 76, said the newly established council will run the government and lead negotiations with the

Houthis, according to a statement aired on state-run media.

The development, which could unify the anti-Houthi camp after years of infighting and disputes, was almost certainly orchestrated in Riyadh where Yemen's pro-government and pro-Saudi factions have been meeting over the past week to discuss efforts to end the war.

"I irreversibly delegate to the Presidential Leadership Council my full powers," Hadi declared on Ye-

men's state-run TV. He also sacked Vice President Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, a powerful military figure, and delegated al-Ahmar's powers to the presidential council. The council is chaired by Rashad al-Alimi, an advisor to Hadi and former interior minister with the government of late strongman President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Al-Alimi enjoys close ties with Saudi Arabia and the powerful Islah party Yemen's branch of the transnational Islamist movement the Muslim Brotherhood.

Yemen's civil war started in 2014, when the Houthis seized the capital of Sanaa, forcing Hadi and his government into exile in Saudi Arabia.

Months later, the Saudi-led coalition entered the war to try to restore Hadi's government to power but the war over the years turned into a stalemated proxy conflict with neither side winning.

Hadi's exile distanced him from events on the ground, with his Saudi backers preventing him from returning to Yemen and the southern port city of Aden the new seat of the exiled government allegedly over safety issues. His administration was accused of gross mismanagement and government employees largely went without salaries.

Separately, Aden became the scene of infighting among the coalition when UAE-backed separatists briefly overtook the city in 2019. A Riyadh-brokered deal later that year attempted to reconcile the separatists and Hadi's forces but power struggles have persisted.

Hadi's rule was also undermined by the UAE's influence in the territories nominally under his control. The UAE trained, financed and armed militias in Yemen and set up prisons. □

Japan, Philippines to step up security ties amid China worry

By **MARI YAMAGUCHI**
Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — The defense ministers of Japan and the Philippines agreed Thursday to bolster security cooperation and expand joint drills between their forces as they shared concerns about China's increasingly assertive military actions in the region.

Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi and his Philippine counterpart, Delfin Lorenzana, also shared concern about Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its impact in the Indo-Pacific, and noted that any attempts to change the status quo by force is unac-

ceptable, Japan's Defense Ministry said in a statement that avoided identifying

China by name. Japan has significantly expanded joint drills with the



Delfin Lorenzana, left, Defense Secretary of the Philippines, and Nobuo Kishi, Defense Minister of Japan attend their meeting at Kishi's ministry in Tokyo, Thursday, April 7, 2022.

Associated Press

United States and other partners, including Australia, India, France, Britain and Germany, that share its concerns about China's assertion of its territorial claims in the region, which has some of the world's busiest sea lanes.

Japan is especially concerned about Chinese military and coast guard activity in the East China Sea near the Japanese-controlled Senkaku islands, which China also claims and calls Diaoyu.

On Thursday, Japan's Defense Ministry said it spotted a Chinese Y-9 electronic warfare aircraft flying over the Sakishima islands,

although it did not violate Japanese airspace.

Kishi and Lorenzana also agreed to increase cooperation in defense equipment and technology transfer between the two countries. Tokyo and Manila agreed in 2020 on the Japanese export of air radar systems to the Philippine military.

For Japan, the Philippines is geopolitically important as China increases its influence in the region.

China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei have been locked in an increasingly tense territorial standoff in the busy waterway for decades. □

Mexicans vote on recall of president, an effort he asked for

By FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — For the first time in history, Mexicans will vote Sunday on whether their president should finish out the rest of his term.

It has been a bizarre journey to this vote. For one thing, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador himself demanded it. The president got angry when electoral officials set up a limited number of polling places to save money. Second, there's little chance that the required minimum of 40% of voters almost 40 million — will show up to make the referendum valid.

And third, there's little chance López Obrador could lose, with current approval ratings of around 60%. So why is Mexico going through with the vote, which will cost almost \$80 million?

Analysts say López Obrador wanted the recall to mobilize and energize his supporters; he is a president who has been constantly on the campaign trail since 2005, and he depicts his administration as a twilight battle to defeat conserva-



A woman, who is marching with relatives of the 43 missing Ayotzinapa students, holds a banner with a message that reads loosely in Spanish, "In this April 10th referendum vote, he must go," in reference to Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's presidential recall referendum to revalidate his administration after three years in office, during a march in Mexico City, Saturday, March 26, 2022.

tives.

So he is hoping the get-out-the-vote effort will shore up his party in state elections this year, with a possible spill-over effect for the 2024 presidential race.

The ballot asks whether López Obrador should continue as president or be replaced.

While some opposition groups have called on people to boycott the vote, some opponents want to actually try to win, and say people should turn out and vote to recall the president. Martín Meneses, 58, a formal postal worker, says such a vote "is important, so the president can see

that the people are waking up from their slumber."

Like many opponents, Meneses sees López Obrador's highly personalistic, charismatic style as weakening democracy. The president has bridled at criticism, verbally attacked journalists, lashed out at judges whose rulings he disagrees with

and has done away with niceties like environmental impact statements for his pet building projects.

Meneses sees the vote as another, expensive play by López Obrador to put himself at center stage. Referring to the government's failure to buy enough medicine for childhood cancer treatments, Meneses objected to "stratospheric costs to hold a vote, when children with cancer don't have medicine."

The president's supporters see the vote as equally vital. María Hernández, a 70-year-old homemaker in Mexico City's rough Colonia Obrera neighborhood, is all too conscious of the old-age stipend of about \$75 per month instituted by López Obrador.

"In good times and bad, we have to stick with him, because if he isn't here, they'll take away the benefits we have," said Hernández.

"They can't recall the guy who has helped us."

Abel Medina, 40, who owns a small tortilla shop in Mexico City's historic downtown, said the vote "will be worth it, to give legitimacy to the president." □

Associated Press

Up to 65% of Africans have had COVID, far more than thought

Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) —

The World Health Organization said that up to 65% of people in Africa have been infected with the coronavirus and estimates the number of actual cases may have been nearly 100 times more than those reported. In a new analysis released Thursday, the U.N. health agency reviewed 151 studies of COVID-19 in Africa based on blood samples taken from people on the continent between January 2020 and December 2021. WHO said that by last September, about 65% of people tested had some exposure to COVID-19, translating into about 800 million infections. In contrast, only about 8 million cases had been officially

reported to WHO during that time period.

"This undercounting is occurring worldwide and it's no surprise that the numbers are particularly large in Africa where there are so many cases with no symptoms," WHO's Africa director Matshidiso Moeti said in a statement. WHO's analysis found that a large proportion of people with COVID-19 67% showed no symptoms when infected with the disease, a higher percentage than other world regions.

Despite repeated warnings from WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus that the coronavirus would devastate Africa, the continent has been among the least affected by the pandemic.

In its new analysis, WHO said the milder COVID-19 cases seen in Africa were attributable in part to the continent's much smaller proportion of people with underlying risk factors like high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease.

"Africa's youthful population is also a protective factor," the U.N. health agency said. Some studies have also suggested that previous infection with diseases including malaria, may offer people some protection against the coronavirus, although those hypotheses have yet to be confirmed. To date, Africa has reported 11.5 million COVID-19 cases including more than 250,000 deaths. WHO said the virus has been trending downwards since January,

although there have been some variations in some countries and some, including South Africa, have been hit particularly hard during successive waves of disease. Last week, WHO said the number of COVID

deaths fell by about 30% on the continent. "Despite Africa's declining infections and high exposure to the virus, we cannot declare victory yet against COVID-19," said WHO Africa chief Moeti. □



Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, the first woman to lead the the World Health Organization's regional Africa office, sits in her office in Brazzaville, Congo, Tuesday Feb. 8, 2022. Associated Press


Associated Press

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More than \$150,000 in prizes
The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba launched its amazing campaign:
Mega Win Luxury Vacations!



PALM BEACH — The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba launched its amazing campaign: **Mega Win Luxury Vacations!** This campaign started on February 1st and will go on till April 30th, 2022, where they will raffle dream vacations to the newest hotels in the Caribbean: The Ritz-Carlton, Turks and Caicos and The St. Regis Bermuda Resort. They will also raffle dream vacations to The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba and more prizes amongst their visitors.

All members of The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba can participate in this campaign till April 30th. There will be still 1 drawing on April 30th. A total of 10 finalists will be selected on each drawing date and will qualify through the raffle tickets in the raffle box and through the MVP (Most Valuable Player) promotion. To participate is very easy: you need to be a member of The Casino VIP Club. For every 80 points you accumulate on slot play and




THE RITZ-CARLTON
ARUBA

every \$40 dollars in Theoretical Win on table play you will receive one ticket. In addition you have the option to receive one free raffle ticket to participate by visiting one of our Restaurants at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba. With every dinner purchase at Casa Nonna New York and BLT Steak, you will receive a voucher to participate. Simply present the restaurant voucher together with the dinner receipt at the Casino VIP Desk on the same night to redeem your raffle ticket.

The prizes for this promotion will be as follows:

- 3 x vacations for two persons to The Ritz-Carlton, Turks and Caicos
- 3 x vacations for two persons to The St. Regis Bermuda Resort
- 3 x vacations for two persons to The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba
- 21 x slot credit prizes for a total of \$52,500

The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba keeps innovating by bringing exciting campaigns for their visitors who are always surprised and excited to participate. Additionally, The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba offers a thoughtfully-tiered player reward program called 'Elevate', featuring exclusive benefits and events for members. Members can earn points for both slot machines and table games and receive cash redemption from slot machine points, while accumulated table comps can be redeemed towards enjoying the hotel's celebrated amenities, including complimentary rooms nights, dining, and spa.

The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba is known as the island's luxury casino where guests enjoy exceptional personalized service, a great selection of table games and state-of-the-art slot machines for a casino experience like no other.

For more information about the Mega Win Luxury Vacations Campaign, the Elevate Tier Program and other promotions, visit us at The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba VIP Desk or call us at 527-2276/ 527-2277 and we will be delighted to assist you. ☐

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Noord – Sometimes all we need is one place where we can do all our shopping at once. Well, Do it center and Super Do it Center Groceries has it all. This is the largest, local owned Do it Center in the Caribbean and best of all a 100% locally owned family business.

How it all began

It was 1938 when Mr. Eric Ponson started his journey at General Store. Ponson did not hesitate and decided to buy General Store. Buying a store and thus going from employee to owner of a business with a debt of 11.000 guilders was not an easy task.

As the saying goes: "Behind every successful man, is a strong woman". In the case of Ponson, this was no different. As General Store progressed and slowly became successful, Mrs. Irene Ponson, came in to assist her husband. Irene Ponson is a visionary, she knew exactly where and how to invest and within a short amount of time in 1970, General Store moved to a better location at the Steenweg. This aloud for

a lot more merchandize, products and employees. Supply and demand was as such, that General Store became the number 1 electrical business. Business kept going so well that the location at the Steenweg became too small and was moved later to Dakota Shopping Paradise and later to Pedro Gallego Straat. With this move, an expansion was decided upon and an electronics store in Savaneta was opened. General Store still being very successful was ready for more growth.

Ricky, Kenneth, Corine and Frans are the fruits of this marriage. Kenneth and Frans however, decided to further develop their father's legacy and continued with their mother's dream to expand the business. An expansion not in square feet only, but in merchandize as well. A great opportunity presented itself when the Ponson family was able to buy a piece of property across from the airport. In 2007 the Ponson family moved into their brand new and huge building. Ponson's General Store now had an electri-



cal department, as housewares department, a paint department and a hardware department.

After a successful opening and expansion, Kenneth and Frans who inherited their mothers vision, decided that General Store was ready for yet another expansion. With the support of Mr. Tom Barfell and management of Do it Best in the States, the construction of Do it Center commenced. Fast forward to today. A Do it Center in Aruba, with more than 50.000 top of the line items for interior as well exterior use, building materials, STO products and a top of the line grocery store. Perseverance, responsibility, vision and the courage to invest have made Ponson's General Store as successful as it is today.

Need a home makeover? Do not skip the furniture department "Leenbakker". Here, you will find a divine collection of European furniture, worldwide known for their modern and stylish features for your bedroom, bathroom, living room or kitchen. For your garden they have a wide selection of durable furniture specially made for our tropical climate. Take a walk around and find some treasures. Find the perfect accessory for your house, fitted for your personality and style. Modern, elegant, retro industrial, whatever your style is you will definitely

find something for your personal taste. Feeling hungry? Take a break and relax at the 'Deli'. Savor a delicious lunch or a sandwich with a cup of coffee or perhaps a wrap. If you are a sweet tooth you will not be able to just skip the great variety of desserts they have. So tempting!

Do it Center Shaba is open from Monday to Saturday from 8AM to 8PM and on Sunday's from 9AM to 6PM.

For more information go to www.doit.aw.



Super Do It Center Shaba & Groceries

Located in Shaba, Noord. This is the last sibling of the Do It Center family. Here you will be able to find anything you are looking for. The building is divided into several departments from home to hardware to groceries. Everything under one roof.

Groceries? Visit the fully stocked supermarket with fresh fruits and vegetables and high class meat selections. Highly known products and brands are here for you to grab. Every week Do It Center Groceries offers you great discount on selected items. Weekly specials are very popular and a perfect chance for you to buy your favorite products at a reduced price.



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Aruba Photo Room presents ISO 20 A photography Exhibition by Nelson Gonzalez



Luna
FOUNDATION

WHERE DOGS ARE SAFE

OUR MISSION

Help as many animals as possible on Aruba

How it all began

Luna foundation Aruba was born out of the story of the dog Luna that was rescued on the island. Luna was badly abused by her owners. She is the first dog in Aruba's history where her owner was arrested for animal abuse. She now lives a healthy and happy life here on the island.

OUR BELIEFS

Every dog deserves...

- fresh food and water daily
- shelter from sun, heat & rain
- veterinary care
- exercise and playtime
- love, respect & kindness

Our goals

- Education at schools how to take care of your animals
- Getting as many sick/old dogs off of the streets and have them taken care of.
- Making sure as many animals as possible are spayed/neutered
- Providing animal owners with help at home so they will be able to take better care of their animals

WHAT WE DO

Shelter

We created a safe haven for all our rescues to be able to have a place to call "home" until they get adopted.

Support

We provide locals with the correct knowledge and advice on how to care for a pet.

Community

We are visibly helping Aruba care for the stray dogs and puppies in their neighborhood with our guidance

Educate

We teach the younger generation in Aruba the importance of animal welfare and need of spaying/neutering.

Save haven

Our safe haven is a secure, peaceful property in the Cunucu (countryside) where abused and stray dogs can recover from a tough life on the streets or in violent homes. The safe haven is their temporary home; a place where they can count on food, water and (health)care and where they can experience attention and love. Every day again.

How we do it

Our volunteers hit the streets on a daily basis to feed the strays. We work together with local communities to educate them on the importance of spaying and neutering, help and advice them and provide them with dog food so they can continue to care for the dogs in their neighborhood. We focus on teaching the next generation to treat our animals fairly, with compassion and love.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

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VOLUNTEER

- Safe haven shifts • dog walking • feeding
- fostering • adopting • shopping

#LOVELUNA

ORANJESTAD - Contemporary artist Nelson Gonzalez, under the curatorship of Fabian Gonçaves Borrega, presents a new collection at Aruba Photo Room at the Talk of the Town Hotel & Beach Club in Oranjestad this April 15, starting at 7:30 pm.

The photographic piece that Gonzalez brings us is a series that was initially captured on 35MM celluloid 20 years ago. In the 2000s, Gonzalez began to create a personal archive, documenting his travels and saving the negatives. This process took place until he migrated to Aruba in 2003.

When the digital world left behind all analog formats, Gonzalez's archive became obsolete and lost for almost two decades. The mistreatment of time on such sensitive material contributes to today's ISO 20 as an artistic project since it was initially intended as an archive. After 20 years, this project is presented for the first time in the form of an exhibition, NFT, and photo-book, locally and in different galleries and international art centers.

Artist Nelson Gonzalez would like to thank Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds Caribbean for supporting the realization of this project in Aruba and supporting important initiatives that enhance and keep alive the creative spirit and heritage value of the future.

The local public is cordially invited. Admission is entirely free, and we look forward to seeing you on April 15, 2022, at 7:30 pm.

More Info contact:
+2975652041
llngonzalez@gmail.com

Use your tax refund to knock down debt, lift your finances

By **LAUREN SCHWAHN** of **NerdWallet**

So you're expecting a tax refund this year. With inflation driving up the price of gas, food and nearly everything else, that extra money can't come soon enough. The hard part is deciding how to spend it. Should you invest the money? Book a trip?

If you really want to do yourself a favor, use your refund to pay off debt. Here's why.

YOU'LL SAVE ON INTEREST

"The cost of carrying debt is very expensive," says AnnaMarie Mock, a certified financial planner with Highland Financial Advisors in Wayne, New Jersey. "Especially if you're looking at regular consumer debt, like credit cards, (the interest rate) could be north of 16%."

Issuers do charge higher rates, often well past 20%, depending on the type of card or the user's credit score.

Let's say you're trying to pay off \$6,000 in credit card debt on a card with a 19% interest rate by paying \$200 a month. You'll pay \$2,204 in total interest by the time the credit card is paid off. Here's how using a tax refund could reduce that cost: If you receive a \$1,500 refund and put the full amount toward the balance, then continue making the same monthly pay-



This Jan. 22, 2020, file photo shows the likeness of Benjamin Franklin on \$100 bills in Dallas.

Associated Press

ment, the total interest you pay would drop to \$1,107. You'd also wipe out the debt a year sooner.

With the Federal Reserve's federal funds interest rate hike in March, plus additional hikes expected later this year, debt is getting even more expensive. Most credit card rates are variable, and issuers will likely raise them in response to the Fed's actions. Pay off more, or all, of your balance now to avoid overspending on interest.

What if you have multiple debts? Accelerating payments on the account with the highest interest rate first, then moving on to the next

highest (a strategy known as debt avalanche), is generally the quickest and cheapest way to become debt-free.

You can use a debt payoff calculator to estimate how different rates and payment strategies will impact how much you owe.

YOU CAN BUILD YOUR CREDIT SCORE

Your credit utilization, or the percentage of your credit limits you're using, is a big factor in your credit score. Using a tax refund to shrink your balance helps shrink your credit utilization, which can benefit your score.

"The higher our credit score, the lower the price be-

comes for life in general," says Tina Herndon, a financial education and training manager with Balance, a nonprofit financial education and counseling organization based in Concord, California.

Paying off debt can get you ahead long term, she says, opening the door to more affordable loans. "If you can pay 2.9% interest on a \$25,000 car versus a 21% interest, it's going to save you hundreds of dollars a month," Herndon says.

A drastic change in credit won't happen overnight, and there are other factors that shape your score.

But paying down high-rate debt is an important step in the right direction. And having lower debt compared to your income can improve your odds of qualifying for new credit.

IT CAN MOTIVATE YOU

Debt can be "a hurdle that people mentally need to overcome before they can potentially go on to the next phase, to start saving for goals," Mock says.

Make a list of your financial goals. Maybe you want to buy a house or send your kid to college. Eliminating debt can bring you closer to reaching those milestones.

Maybe your goal is simply to be debt-free. Even if your refund isn't enough to wipe out your debt all at once, watching your balance drop can build the momentum you need to keep chipping away at it.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO SACRIFICE FUN

Using your refund for debt repayment doesn't mean there's no room for fun purchases. In fact, by reducing debt you'll have more funds available to do with what you please.

Once you've paid off your bills, you can take the amount you were spending on payments and put it toward something that brings you joy. Boost your entertainment budget or start a vacation fund, for example. □

Is inflation finally biting into corporate profits?

By **STAN CHOE**
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Since inflation began bursting higher last year, big U.S. companies have found a simple way to keep making record profits: Pass all those price increases along to their customers.

But the formula may be showing signs of reaching its limit, which adds drama to the upcoming earnings reporting season. CEOs are lining up to tell investors in upcoming weeks how much their businesses earned in the first three

months of the year. They're widely expected to say that growth for the S&P 500 will be the slowest since the end of 2020.

Analysts are forecasting a 4.7% rise in earnings per share from a year earlier, according to FactSet. If they're right, it would mark the first time S&P 500 earnings growth fell short of 10% since the final three months of 2020, according to FactSet. Consider Delta Air Lines, which next week will be one of the first companies to report results. When the quarter began, analysts

were forecasting a loss of 68 cents per share. By March 31, analysts downgraded their forecasts to a sharper loss of \$1.36 per share, in large part because surging oil prices raised jet-fuel costs. That's despite Delta's saying in mid-March that it would likely make more in revenue during the quarter than it earlier expected.

Not only are companies' costs continuing to rise, but their customers may also be starting to balk at paying the higher prices getting passed along. U.S. consumer spending rose in



Trader Robert Arciero works on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, Aug. 10, 2021.

Associated Press

March from February, for example, but the increase was entirely because of the higher prices consumers paid for products and

services. After taking that inflation into account, consumers reined in spending by more last month than economists expected. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

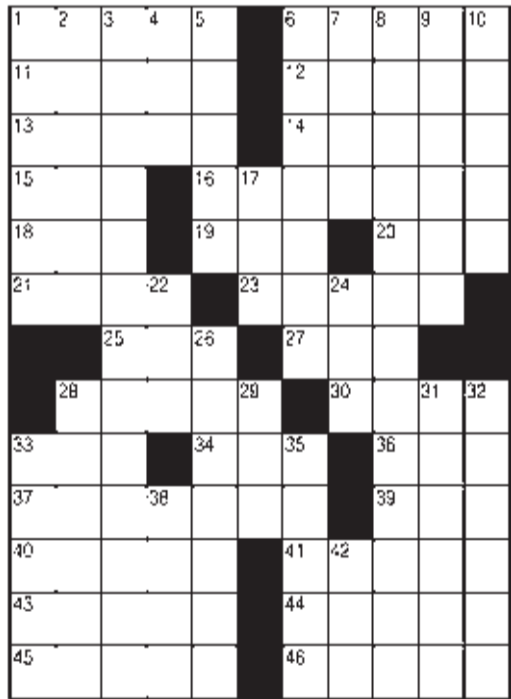
- ACROSS** 41 Writer
 1 Coffee bar Zola
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 11 Massage 44 Gem side
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 12 Dote on shade
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Yesterday's answer

- 14 Easy** 8 William 28 New York
 basket 1 Hoi polloi Styron native
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Big — 3 E.B. White straight 32 Messages
16 Nickname book 10 Car's with
18 Wing 4 That scars followers
19 In addition woman 17 Luau dish 33 "Jurassic
20 They hold 5 Useful 22 Pricing Park"
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21 Cease 6 Parcels 24 — Gatos 35 Fissure
23 Cove out 26 Eeyore's 38 Blue hue
25 Brewed 7 Fix copy creator 42 Spoil
 beverage

- 27 Sinking
 signal
 28 Purse part
 30 Paisley
 person
 33 Singer
 Kiki
 34 Buddy
 36 Question
 of method
 37 Impart
 over time
 39 Exalted
 work
 40 Stairway
 post



4-8

AXYDLBAAXR
 is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

4-8 **CRYPTOQUOTE**
 OE JW HVA HXWVA ZM LZG
 JLGXN, O'XX TWQ ULZ JW
 HVA VHFOWBW JVGM NGOBW.

— JOXXOVD RFVQAWG
 Yesterday's Cryptoquote: WHEN YOU REACH THE END OF YOUR ROPE, TIE A KNOT IN IT AND HANG ON. — FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

Dolphins' playful social habits form bonds, but spread virus



In this May 2019 photo provided by the Potomac-Chesapeake Dolphin Project, dolphins swim together in the Potomac River between Lewisetta and Smith Point, Va.

Associated Press

By CHRISTINA LARSON
 AP Science Writer
 REEDVILLE, Va. (AP) — Three young male dolphins simultaneously break the water's surface to breathe — first exhaling, then inhaling — before slipping back under the waves of the Chesapeake Bay.
 "A perfect sync," said Janet Mann, a dolphin researcher watching from a small skiff.

Synchronized breathing is something dolphins often do with close pals, like these males, or that mothers and calves do together, said Mann. It's a way of affirming the relationships that are so important to these highly intelligent and social mammals, like a handshake or a hug among humans.
 "It says, 'We're together,'" said Mann, who is based at Georgetown University.

While such close contact is essential to dolphin social bonds, sharing space and air can also quickly spread disease.
 Mann and other scientists are trying to understand how a highly contagious and lethal disease called cetacean morbillivirus — related to measles in hu-

mans and first detected in Virginia and Maryland waters — can spread rapidly among dolphins along the Atlantic Coast, as it did from 2013 to 2015.
 During that outbreak, more than 1,600 dolphins washed ashore on beaches from New York to Florida, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Altogether, an estimated 20,000 dolphins died from the virus, and the region's population of coastal dolphins shrank by about 50%.
 "It's much like COVID — it's respiratory" in how it spreads, said Mann. "When dolphins breathe together at the surface, they're sharing respiratory droplets just like we do when we're talking or coughing on each other."
 She realized that the key to understanding swift virus transmission was tracing dolphin social networks, much as public health authorities have tracked the COVID-19 pandemic.
 To understand how diseases circulate in social animals — such as humans, dolphins or chimpanzees — scientists must scrutinize not

only the biology of a virus, but also how vulnerable populations interact, said Jacob Negrey, a researcher who studies animal viruses at Wake Forest School of Medicine.

"Contact networks represent a double-edged sword," he said. "Your friends that you need are also the individuals most likely to get you sick."
 Dolphins are extremely playful animals and often swim close together, sometimes even touching fins. "We call it holding hands," said Mann, who also directs the nonprofit Potomac-Chesapeake Dolphin Project.

Although many people casually refer to a "pod" of dolphins, Mann dislikes the term, because it implies a stable group, like a pack of wolves. What she's observed over 35 years of studying dolphins in the U.S. and Australia is that while dolphins have close buddies, they come and go regularly to check on others.

In the Chesapeake Bay area, tracking how dolphins mingle has required the scientists to distinguish more than 2,000 dolphins, mostly by distinctive shapes and markings of their dorsal fins.

"To me it's like a face," said Mann. "I joke with my students that if they wore dorsal fin hats, I would remember all their names."

On mornings with light wind, the scientists set out in an 18-foot (5.5-meter) skiff to look for dolphins near where the Potomac River empties into the bay. A trained eye can notice slight splashing on the water a mile (1.6 kilometers) away, or catch the glint of sunlight on a fin or tail.

"I'm looking for dark objects breaking the surface of the water," said Georgetown biologist Melissa Collier, scanning the horizon through binoculars.

Suddenly, she shouted for the boat to slow down and pointed with one hand. "Dolphins by the pier, close to shore." □

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Meta: Russian invasion driving more disinformation online



In this Oct. 28, 2021, photo, Facebook unveiled their new Meta logo on a sign at the company headquarters in Menlo Park, Calif.

Associated Press

By DAVID KLEPPER
Associated Press

Hackers aligned with Russia broke into the social media accounts of dozens of Ukrainian military officers and were working to upload videos of defeated and surrendering Ukrainian soldiers when the plot was disrupted, according to a report Thursday from Meta that details a troubling increase in social media disinformation this year. The report from the owner of Facebook and Instagram found a surge in content linked to Russia's invasion of Ukraine as well as new cases of domestic disinformation and propaganda in countries around the world, suggesting that tactics pioneered by foreign intelligence agencies are now being used more widely. "While much of the public attention in recent years has been focused on foreign interference, domes-

tic threats are on the rise globally," said Nick Clegg, Meta's president for global affairs and a former British deputy prime minister. Russia and its allies are major players, according to the report, with groups linked to the Kremlin spreading disinformation about its invasion of Ukraine while amplifying pro-Russian conspiracy theories at home. Meta traced the effort to take over the social media accounts of dozens of Ukrainian military leaders back to a shadowy hacker organization known as Ghostwriter, which previous research has linked to Belarus, a Russian ally. Ghostwriter has a history of spreading content critical of NATO, and also has tried to hack email accounts. "This is a tried-and-true thing that they do," said Ben Read, director of cyberespionage analysis at Mandiant, a prominent U.S. cybersecurity firm that

has tracked Ghostwriter's activities for years. Last year Mandiant said digital clues suggested the hackers were based in Belarus, though EU officials have previously blamed Russia. Belarus and Russia have not responded to the claims. The report outlined other disinformation efforts tied to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, including one involving dozens of fake accounts that spread anti-Ukrainian rhetoric. Another network filed thousands of fake complaints about Ukrainian Facebook users in an effort to get them kicked off the platform. That network hid its activities in a Facebook group supposedly dedicated to cooking. Within Russia, the Kremlin has blocked hundreds of news sources and websites, including Facebook and Twitter, and threatened jail time to anyone who tries to report on the war. In the place of accurate journalism, the state-

controlled media have pumped out discredited conspiracy theories about Ukrainian Nazis or secret U.S. bioweapon labs. Meta and other big tech companies have responded by removing or restricting Russian state-run media, by targeting disinformation networks and by labeling content it does not remove. Twitter this week announced it would also label state-controlled media from Belarus. □



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2 Bed Ocean view \$17,500
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3 Bed Ocean view \$28,000
WK 51 Garden view \$42,500
WK 52 Oceanside \$55,000
WK 7 and 14 - all views

GOLD SEASON

2 Bed Oceanfront \$14,000
2 Bed Oceanside \$11,000
2 Bed Ocean view \$8,000
2 Bed Garden view \$6,000
3 Bed Ocean view \$13,000

Marriott Aruba Ocean Club

PLATINUM SEASON

2 Bed Oceanfront \$31,000
2 Bed Ocean view \$18,500
1 Bed ocean front \$17,500
1 Bed ocean view \$12,000

GOLD SEASON

2 Bed Oceanfront \$14,000
2 Bed Ocean view \$9,500
1 Bed oceanfront \$9,000
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'Sonic 2' is a rushed, over-the-top sequel

By **LINDSEY BAHR**
AP Film Writer

The fact that "Sonic the Hedgehog 2" exists is not exactly a mystery.

The first film was a financial success for Paramount Pictures and by the year's end would hold the distinction of being the No. 2 release in North America. That second fact should be taken with a grain of salt though. It's mostly dumb luck: The studio released it in February 2020, a month before theaters closed and studios began jettisoning their films to streamers or later release dates.

Still, sequels have been greenlit on less and "Sonic" didn't just have dollars going for it. On the forgiving curve of video game properties being turned into potential franchises for studios desperate for a sure thing, it also wasn't half bad. There were enough genuinely funny moments to make it enjoyable and much of that had to do with James Marsden's performance as Sonic's human companion Tom. Marsden is unbelievably natural and charming while acting against a co-



This image released by Paramount Pictures shows Sonic, voiced by Ben Schwartz, in "Sonic the Hedgehog 2."

balt blue, computer-generated alien.

It should have been a promising development that the entire original team assembled to get "Sonic 2" to theaters, including director Jeff Fowler, writers Pat Casey and Josh Miller, and the cast — Marsden, Ben Schwartz as Sonic, Jim Carrey as Dr. Robotnik, Tika Sumpter as Tom's wife Maddie and supporting standouts Natasha Rothwell and Adam Pally.

And yet "Sonic 2" feels extremely rushed. Though it starts off promisingly enough with Carrey's

character marooned on a "piece of shitake" mushroom planet, it soon becomes evident that this outing is a soulless attempt to up the stakes and cash in.

It is a slapdash extravaganza that doubles down on its CGI stars, adding a bad guy Echidna, Knuckles (Idris Elba), and a friend/Sonic superfan, Tails (Colleen O'Shaughnessey), for a globetrotting journey to find an all-powerful emerald, and relegates its human counterparts to the background to its own detriment. Kids may be

pleased with the shift in balance, but their parental companions will likely be running for the door (or earplugs).

The humor also feels like it was generated by a game of pop culture mad libs, with snarks about everything from Vin Diesel and The Rock to Limp Bizkit.

For instance, "Oh great, the Winter Soldier," Sonic deadpans as Knuckles chases after him on a snowy mountain in Siberia. This referential strategy can and has worked when done thoughtfully. Here it just comes across as a first

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draft at making a PG-rated "Deadpool." And in the last third, the filmmakers decide to just do a full homage to the opening of "Raiders of the Lost Ark."

Sonic is also now being positioned as a fledgling superhero who still has a lot to learn. Sure, what else can you really do to stretch this character into a big movie franchise that people care about? But it also takes the air and excitement out of the journey by making it something that we've seen many, many times before. Is there nothing else you can do with a superspeed alien hedgehog?

Then there's Carrey, whose larger-than-life performance isn't even big enough to compete with the CG action soup. It's a shame to squander a roster of talented comedic actors who seem game to do anything opposite their alien counterparts. Hopefully there's time for a little reflection before the next one is fast-tracked to a VFX house to do the brunt of the work. What this franchise needs most at this point is to slow down. □



Actor Tom Pelphrey poses at his home in Austin, Texas, on March 11, 2022, to promote his new Amazon Prime series "Outer Range," premiering April 15.

By **ALICIA RANCILIO**
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — "Ozark" will drop its final seven episodes of the series April 29, wrapping up the story of a couple, played by Jason Bateman and Laura Linney (Marty and Wendy Byrde), whose family moves to Missouri and descends deeper and deeper into a life of money laundering, drugs and murder.

Tom Pelphrey (Ben) is no

longer on the show, but his character has made a lasting imprint. Pelphrey's character was introduced in season three as Wendy's brother. A tortured soul with a heart of gold, Ben had bipolar disorder and stopped taking his medication. His resulting erratic behavior threatened the Byrde's underbelly operation.

Spoiler alert: In the season three finale, Wendy left Ben in the path of a hitman and

After 'Ozark' role, Tom Pelphrey is on Hollywood's radar

the show has operated since as though the character is dead (although fans hope it's not true.) Ben looms large over the remaining "Ozark" story.

A pivotal scene for Pelphrey and for viewers, was of Ben riding in a taxi. He talks at the driver for more than four minutes, in a very non-linear pattern, quickly shifting topics while sometimes in tears, highlighting his mental illness.

"As an actor, there's nothing you want more or there's nothing more than having good material," said Pelphrey recently over Zoom. "I'd had weeks to prepare, so I memorized it back and forth and up and down, and I knew it as good as I knew my name. We did that speech so many different times in so many dif-

ferent ways and each time they would just let me go." Pelphrey was already on an upward career trajectory going into "Ozark," but he admits it "was a game changer job." Later that year, he also appeared in David Fincher's "Mank" and next co-stars with Josh Brolin in the supernatural mystery series "Outer Range" for Amazon Prime, also debuting this month. Filming began on "Outer Range" in January 2021 in New Mexico, when the pandemic and restrictions kept many people indoors. Safety protocols on set were strict, and Pelphrey describes it as "a strange sense of being completely isolated, juxtaposed with the most amazing cast." He says the filming bubble brought the cast closer

together, and they all still keep in touch.

Work keeps Pelphrey on the move. He likes to drive to his filming locations with his trusty dog, Blue. He just filmed a limited series with Elizabeth Olsen and Jesse Plemons called "Love and Death" for HBO Max. He also has a role in "She Said" based on the book by New York Times journalists Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, about their investigation into Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein and sexual misconduct.

Pelphrey, originally from New Jersey, says he isn't sure what comes next. "I've thankfully had a very good run recently.

But it also means. I haven't really been home in a long time. I am completely at peace and grateful." □

2 more Black coaches sue NFL alleging racial discrimination

By LARRY NEUMEISTER

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Two Black coaches joined Brian Flores on Thursday in his lawsuit alleging racist hiring practices by the NFL when there are vacancies for coaches and general managers.

The updated lawsuit in Manhattan federal court added coaches Steve Wilks and Ray Horton.

The lawsuit said Wilks was discriminated against by the Arizona Cardinals in 2018 when he was hired as a "bridge coach" but was given no meaningful chance to succeed, while Horton was subjected to discriminatory treatment when he was given a sham interview for the Tennessee Titans head coach position in January 2016.

Flores also criticized the NFL in the rewritten lawsuit for its response to the lawsuit he brought against it and its teams several weeks ago. The lawsuit added the Houston Texans to the teams Flores has alleged discriminated against him, saying the Texans engaged in "blatant retaliation" by removing him from consideration for its head coach vacancy after he sued the league.

In a release from the lawsuit's attorneys, Wilks said he hoped the lawsuit would help bring racial equality to the league. Arizona replaced Wilks with Kliff Kingsbury, a white man with no NFL coaching experience, and gave a white general



Cleveland Browns defensive coordinator Steve Wilks walks on the sideline during an NFL football game against the Cincinnati Bengals, Sunday, Dec. 8, 2019, in Cleveland.

Associated Press

manager an extension despite a drunk driving conviction.

"When Coach Flores filed this action, I knew I owed it to myself, and to all Black NFL coaches and aspiring coaches, to stand with him," Wilks said. "This lawsuit has shed further important light on a problem that we all know exists, but that too few are willing to confront. Black coaches and candidates should have exactly the same ability to become employed, and remain employed, as white coaches and candidates." Horton said he was "devastated and humiliated" when he learned that his interview with the Titans was a sham.

"By joining this case, I am

hoping to turn that experience into a positive and make lasting change and create true equal opportunity in the future," he said. The NFL declined to comment Thursday.

"The decisions we made after the 2018 season were very difficult ones," the Arizona Cardinals said in a statement. "But as we said at the time, they were entirely driven by what was in the best interests of our organization and necessary for team improvement. We are confident that the facts reflect that and demonstrate that these allegations are untrue."

Houston, in a statement, said its search for a head coach was "very thorough and inclusive."

"Due to his previous success as a coach in the NFL, Brian Flores was among the first candidates we held a formal interview with for the position and he remained a candidate until the very end," it said. "We enjoyed our multiple conversations with Brian regarding his vision for our organization." It added: "In the end, we made the decision to hire Lovie Smith as our head coach and we believe he is the best fit for our team moving forward. It was a very fluid process that allowed us to spend time with a number of quality candidates. We are proud of our decision and will vigorously defend our process." Smith, who is Black, was announced as the Texans

head coach in February. He served as the team's defensive coordinator in 2021.

The Titans in a statement defended their 2016 coach selection process as "thoughtful and competitive," saying it obeyed NFL guidelines and its organizational values.

"We conducted detailed, in-person interviews with four talented individuals, two of whom were diverse candidates. No decision was made, and no decision was communicated, prior to the completion of all interviews," the Titans said.

The Titans concluded their interview with Horton by midday Jan. 16, 2016, and announced Mularkey was hired hours later. Mularkey said on a podcast in 2020 that he still regretted taking part in the interview process after having been told he would be the Titans' head coach before they satisfied the Rooney Rule.

"I sat there knowing I was the head coach in '16 as they went through this fake hiring process ...," Mularkey said then. "I'm sorry I did that. It was not the way to go about it."

Flores sued the NFL and three teams on Feb. 1 after he was fired as Miami Dolphins coach in January after leading the Dolphins to a 24-25 record over three years. They went 9-8 in their second straight winning season, but failed to make the playoffs during his tenure. □

MLB Clemente Award winners wear his 21 on caps for careers

NEW YORK (AP) — Winners of the Roberto Clemente Award will wear his No. 21 on the back of their caps for the rest of their major league careers. Major League Baseball made the announcement Thursday, saying it was a "special tribute to his enduring legacy." The announcement was timed for the 50th anniversary of the year in which Clemente died in a plane crash while on a humanitar-

ian relief effort. The award is announced during each World Series and given to a player for "extraordinary character, community involvement, philanthropy and positive contributions, both on and off the field." Clemente was from Puerto Rico and became a Hall of Fame right fielder with the Pittsburgh Pirates.

"It means the world," said Boston Red Sox manager Alex Cora, who is from Puer-

to Rico. "Everybody knows why you are wearing that number, it means a lot, for the player, for the families, for the organizations. I think it's a great way to show respect to the individual. ...

"How much appreciation the world has for Roberto Clemente, and sometimes we come up short in our island, which is embarrassing, right? Like we should do more. But I'm glad that everybody else in the world



Roberto Clemente of the Pittsburgh Pirates is seen in Tampa, Fla., March 3, 1963.

Associated Press

is showing respect to Roberto. It's not that we don't show respect to him, be-

cause he's our guy, but we should do a little more," he said. □

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Tiger Time: Woods thrills patrons with Masters comeback

By **PAUL NEWBERRY**
AP Sports Writer

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — He walked among the azaleas with just the slightest hint of a limp.

He couldn't quite bend over to read the putts on Augusta National's tricky greens.

Otherwise, there was nothing to indicate that Tiger Woods nearly lost his right leg 14 months ago in a devastating car wreck.

Woods' greatest comeback yet got off to an electrifying start Thursday when he shot a 1-under 71 in the opening round of the Masters.

"To end up in the red," he said confidently, "I'm right where I need to be."

As Woods walked briskly toward the clubhouse after a grueling day that stretched to nearly 5 1/2 hours, he heard shouts of "Way to go, Tiger!" from the spectators. He was just three strokes off the lead - with roughly half the field still on the course - after making three birdies, a pair of bogeys and a whole lot of solid pars — many of them salvaged by his deft touch around the greens.

Woods pulled off one last Houdini act at No. 18. After yanking his tee shot into the towering pine trees on the right, he had to lay up short of the green.

But he pitched to 6 feet and rolled in the putt to keep his score under par.

"I felt good," Woods said. "Once the adrenaline kicks in and I get into my own little world, I knew I should be able to handle business."



Tiger Woods holds up his ball after a birdie on the 13th hole during the first round at the Masters golf tournament on Thursday, April 7, 2022, in Augusta, Ga.

Yep, there's still a long way to go. Woods still must prove his body can bounce back day after day — four of them, should he make it to Sunday.

But it felt as if he was already a winner.

"You just can't not watch him," said Australia's Cameron Smith, among those tied for the lead after shooting a 68. "It's an inspiration with him coming back and playing golf."

With storm clouds giving way to brilliant spring sunshine, Woods defied everyone's expectations.

Except his own.

When Woods delivered an emphatic clutch of the right fist after rolling in a 30-footer for birdie at the 16th hole, it seemed like old times at one of golf's most hallowed courses.

From the collapse of his marriage to multiple surgeries, Woods has always found a way to bounce back.

He's doing it again, looking every bit like the guy who's won five green jackets and defied the odds time and time again.

A tap-in birdie at No. 6 sent the patrons into a frenzy. A sloppy bogey at the par-5 eighth brought some groans, but Woods' brilliant short game kept him from posting one of those big numbers that can spell doom at Augusta.

He made it clear he had every intention of winning when he decided to make the Masters his first competitive tournament since that horrific car wreck in February 2021 led him to say doctors said his right

leg might need to be amputated.

Woods started the round with five straight pars — he just missed a birdie at the tough No. 5 hole when a 15-foot putt lipped out — before delivering a vintage tee shot at the par-3 sixth. The ball climbed up a ridge on the green and stopped 2 feet short of the flag, leaving Woods with a gimme that put him in red numbers for the first time.

A wedge shot and errant chip led to a bogey at No. 8, a hole that should be a prime birdie opportunity. "A loss of concentration there," he moaned.

But Woods bounced back with a tricky downhill from 8 feet to save par at No. 9. Woods insisted his hands still held the amazing touch that has helped him win

15 major titles — the first of them 25 years ago at this very place — and capture a record-tying 82 victories on the PGA Tour.

Beginning at No. 7, he missed the green on five straight holes, but kept recovering with his short irons and putter.

Wearing a pink shirt and black pants, Woods was greeted by thunderous applause when his name was announced to a huge gallery surrounding the first tee.

Woods failed to make solid contact with his first shot: a 264-yard drive that faded behind a bunker on the right side of the fairway. His approach rolled off the front of the green, but he sank a 10-foot putt to save par, bringing another huge roar from the patrons.

He couldn't fully bend over to read putts, forcing him to rely more on caddie Joe LaCava to help him judge the treacherous greens at Augusta National.

But those felt like minor inconveniences after all he's been through.

Woods' career was in jeopardy after the car wreck left him confined to a hospital bed for three months. Woods was out of the public eye until last November, when he posted a video of him swinging a club with a simple message, "Making progress."

His lone tournament in the 508 days since he last competed was a just-for-fun event in December in which he rode in a cart and was paired with his 13-year-old son, Charlie. □